



## The EcoMedia Compass

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### The Salton Sea



Although the state of California's Salton Sea is a tricky situation; there are a number of very viable solutions proposed that can make light out the darkness that too many people focus on. If current water transfer agreements are kept in place and the Salton Sea is left to dry up; there would be many more negative impacts than simply a few kids coughing and a few birds dying.

It would cost more money not to save it. The in-depth Pacific Institute study states a price tag of \$50-70Billion for inaction. Owens valley in Northern California was once a large lake, and by pitting farmers against each other, was diverted to bring water into Los Angeles. According to California State bill AB-147:

"From 1913 to 1924, inclusive, a similar rural-to-urban water transfer occurred when the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) began exporting water from Owens Lake to Los Angeles. After only 11 years, LADWP had successfully drained all but a fraction of Owens Lake, exposing over 100 square miles of lake bed."

"For decades, the winds blowing across the exposed lake bed of Owens Lake eroded fine-grained sediments and salts, lofting them into the air, creating the single largest source of fugitive dust in the United States"

In the last fifteen years; “LADWP has spent one billion two hundred million dollars (\$1,200,000,000) to stem dust pollution in Owens Valley mainly by flooding a 40-square-mile area of exposed lake bed at a cost of 30 billion gallons of water a year.” That is significantly smaller than the Salton sea’s 376 sq. miles.

That area became a dust bowl. Southern California’s air quality affected by Salton Sea water transfers would be much worse due to the presence of fertilizers in agricultural runoff. The crops around the Salton Sea haven’t all been grown “organically”. .” This very fine PM-10 dust has the ability to cause widespread lung diseases including but not limited to cancer, emphysema, rhinitis, bronchitis and asthma. Certain wind patterns such as Santa Ana winds blow this air directly over San Diego, Orange County and Los Angeles. Other wind patterns include Arizona and Mexico. Currently, Salton Sea is still safe, Class A, rec-1 water and the prevalence of these nutrients that sit at the bottom of the water have not been documented to cause harm to people. Many people at the Salton Sea regularly swim, fish and thoroughly enjoy the water.

Aside from air quality concerns, In the last 110 years, the Salton Sea has become an invaluable habitat for over 400 bird species. (With over 90 percent of California’s original wetlands gone and turned into homes, businesses and marinas, the Salton Sea has become one of the most important nesting sites and stopovers along the Pacific Flyway. In some years, as many as 95 percent of the North American population of eared grebes may use the Sea, 90 percent of American white pelicans, 50 percent of ruddy ducks and 40 percent of Yuma clapper rails. All of these species are of concern at either regional,

continental or global scales. With its marine, freshwater, desert, wetland and agricultural habitats, the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge and other areas provide habitat for hundreds of birds and wetland species; including several that have been listed as endangered or sensitive by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This keystone habitat also helps to keep our coastal fish and insect population at manageable levels. The sea is a prolific place for fish. It contains an estimated hundreds of millions of tilapia and a few other species and is still one of America's best fisheries. One more amazing underdeveloped renewable technology is growing algae as a biofuel; which has the potential to yield close to 100 more gallons per acre of oil than corn or soybeans.

Salton Sea is also sitting atop America's most commercially viable source of geothermal power; clean, constant and renewable energy to get us off reliance for fossil fuels. So much potential, so little time.

The Salton Sea state park once had more annual attendance than California's Yosemite. It's 100 plus miles of shoreline is a breathtaking place for nature buffs, camping, boating, fishing, water skiing, kayaking, beach going, bird watching, photography, sun setting and all around adventuring. The great thing about saving this place is that by planning ahead before we lose it, even aside from tourism, it can actually pay for itself to be fixed. As soon as the State makes a real step, the property values will skyrocket.

It is clear that we need to work immediately on short-term projects such as expansion of wetlands, diligently being undertaken by Imperial County, Imperial Irrigation and the Sonny Bono Wetlands.

We must not forget though that this is a long-term region. There will still be people and animals relying on this place for a happy and healthy home in 10,20,30 and 100 years from now. We must start the process of executing a long-term solution as well. Letting the QSA go without planning for mitigating its consequences is plain stupid. Let's restore the Salton Sea. Let's set a long-term goal, start some paperwork for securing enough water for the Sea, and for the metropolitan areas to get enough from their transfer. One proposed long-term solution is a pipeline from the Sea of Cortez, running 230 feet downhill into Salton Sea. The landowners in Mexico have already said yes. What is the absolute way to stop dust? Keep it wet. We will be leading a walk from the Sea of Cortez to the Salton Sea in February of 2017 if you'd like to come. This, alongside salinity management with dikes such as the Salton Sea Authority perimeter lake plan can bring this lake back to a real asset for our country.

Let's make sure there will be enough water here to have options.

Hey, I'd drink desalinated water. Less than 3% of the water in the world is fresh, it doesn't make a lot of sense to use up all we have by draining all inland waterways for agriculture and consumption. Have you seen what the Seawater Foundation can grow with ocean water? We must plan for the future.

Overall, this place is incredibly beautiful and has amazing potential to be a model of wise water consumption and environmental sustainability for the world. There are so many that want to help, but they need to see a real effort from the State. I urge you to do what

is right and allocate 3-5 \$Billion dollars now toward short, medium and long-term Salton Sea restoration. It will be one of the best decisions the State Water Board has ever made.

Sincerely,

Kerry F. Morrison

Executive Director

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